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A PYROMANCER'S GUIDE TO ENTROPOLOGY

GENERICSCIENCE,
MASHINES

CAPITAL, ENTROPY, INFORMATION, KYBERNETIK,
NEGENTROPY, TECHNOLOGY

"Life is to capital as light is to a blackhole."

- Louis Armand

"Mere words, you say?"

But words the color of pulsating flesh

Words the color of mountains on heat.

Of cities on fire."^[1]

– Franz Fanon

The lyricism of Franz Fanon's words sprung directly before me as I looked at the cover and read the title – "*Entropology*," (it said), "*by Louis Armand*," and that is exactly the "vibe" I got from the book. I was affected immediately. Not a lot of books have this effect on me. The other one was *Order Out of Chaos* by Prigogine and Stengers. Some authors are entirely in heat: George Bataille, of course. Some books are as if they have just been taken out of a hot furnace, like they were soaked in lava, but somehow preserved and you need a pair of metallic tweezers to flip the pages. That's Entropology. The term was initially coined by Levi-Strauss, it refers to an anthropology of dissipative systems. A cybernetic model for a being-toward-death. All systems *are* dissipative and they are held up only in virtue of being *dancing stars*. All systems are in heat. All systems are entropic. What's in a name then? The likeliest possibility of course: its negation. All written signs are orchestrated by an incendiary discourse through the possibility of their complete extinguishment and erasure. The levelling of all differences. Among a myriad of things, Armand offers us a critique of cybernetics. What is a *state* other than the political economy that sustains it, either as "concept" or "object"? A state or a system is nothing but the surface effect, a fleeting *connaissance* of turbulent fluctuations that keep it afloat. *Entropy is articulate*. And the self-articulation of chaos is what we call order. Any sharp distinction between entropy and self-organization will lead to an ideologization of cybernetic thermodynamics. Technically, cybernetic thermodynamics is the ideologization of "nature" – the multiplicity of far-from-equilibrium processes that we encounter day to day. "...every system overproduces itself, and every system exists in a state of inchoate crisis" (Armand, 2022). Words that echo Heraclitus.

The most certain truisms, things that we all know without doubt, are the ones that are held together by the darkest mysteries. The crudest overgeneralizations and trivialities are in effect completely divorced from the tangible and the real. "Nothing lasts forever". What is "nothing"? What is "forever"? The more we dwell on it, the more these common facts of life begin to sound like incoherent murmur, or prayer. No less than the on-going chatter concerning the black-boxes of machine learning systems. Algorithms, unlike logic and more abstract pen-and-pencil formal systems (though these too are quite insane), are known to behave erratically. The more copacetic and diamond-like a system purports itself to be, the more it tends to run on a constant input of catastrophe. Crisis fuels the clean and tidy spaces of consumption under Capitalism... as the genocide in Gaza fuels the politics of health and self-care under the administrative apparatus of Israeli biopolitics and Zionist population science.

The Anthropocene marks a turning point in our geological and cultural history, where the natural and the artificial are no longer, even in principle, separable. This activates a new eco-regime with its own novel distribution of counterfeit equilibria and fake stabilities. The paternalistic "rational" corporate state supplemented by data-driven mythology of sentient machines and the fully automated blissfully luxurious singularity. A space-heaven with bionic bodies and resurrected machinic flesh. A glorious technocratic and religio-heroic narrative that justifies the on-going colonial exploitation and extractive practices; both analog (natural resources, human labor, outsourcing wars etc.) and digital (data mining, surveillance, clickbait capitalism and so on). The contemporary soteriological narratives contain both entropic and negentropic elements: "*the New Myths are a dialectical ensemble of overabundant crises, of*

renewable apocalypse. It achieves its apotheosis in the ongoing spectacle of the disintegration & reconstitution of the spectacle itself" (Armand, 2022). Cybernetic heavens it seems will be sustained by automated concentration camps for those deemed lazy, unproductive or less-than-human. Violent musings on our contemporary *Entropocene*.

Things do indeed breakdown and the line between order and disintegration is indeed murky and unclear. Nonetheless, we do observe spontaneous self-organization in nature, no matter how strange and unexplainable it tends to be. In this context Louis Armand, taking up Levi-Strauss's abandoned project of Entropology and drawing heavily from Stiegler, offers us a sketch of what is termed *Negentropology*. A kind of being-toward-life used to counteract and redistribute the entropic effects of power. The key, according to Armand, lies within a reconceptualization and an alternate attitude towards noise. If entropy is seen as an enabling condition, rather than an obstacle or negative by-product of order, then the surest way out of a constraining system would be no less than the sweet embrace of chaos. Randomness is the cherry on top; the final touch that completes the work – *all in moderation, including moderation* – openness seals the system.

It is precisely in this sense that the apocalypse is, and always has been, *now*. This is why the prophecies of annihilation are always and at the same time, promises of rebirth and rejuvenation. Because the only way things can become stable, real, comprehensible and coherent is through an on-going process of destruction and decoherence. "*...all evolution is, in its major convulsions, catastrophic*" (Armand, 2022). Tangentially, we could reflect here, on how even nihilism is nothing less than a solicitation of the void. Non-being is fetishized as an object of fascinated consumption. Willing nothingness before not willing at all.

A *feedback eschatology* of a fascist algorithm seems to be the order of the day. Modernity enacts the very future it claims to have predicted. In this sense it is not so different from the Stalinist 5-year plans that dominated Soviet governmentalities. We will not *become* bionic, as we have not *become* cybernetic nor did we become textual with the introduction of the writing medium some two thousand years ago and we certainly did not *begin* to speak with the evolution of the vocal apparatus. What happened instead was an ontological and mysterious shift in comprehension, the world itself morphed and transformed with the introduction of every medium. Each metamorphosis was a mutation in *techné*, a discontinuity that placed the subject at the limit of her world and then re-arranged the fundamental apparatus of perception. A change in the means of communication resulted in a revision of all previous experience. The spoken objects will never return to the state of pure kinesthetic comprehension, the written object will in turn forever disguise the objects of orality, the printed text will introduce an amnesia for the written word and the digital episteme will introduce a terminal change to the pure mechanics of the type(writer). The writer has no access to the world of oral speech, the typewriter has occluded the world of transcription by hand and the cybernetic dispositif will never allow us to return to the analog forms of mechanical communication. It is in this sense that we never became bionic and a sense in which we never had flesh, we were never biological, the machine will never know how to revert to the animal. From now and forever we are and always will remain transhuman and post-biological. These are just the *technical machinations* of power.

Language; in all and any of its materialities, is a prime example of a negentropic process.

Entropy, as we said, is articulate and, in its articulation, it transcends and negates itself. Meaning emerges from nonsense, information out of noise, life out of inorganic matter – something bursts forth out of nothing. Language is the Heraclitian fire that consumes itself and grows through annihilation. A lot of Armand's work is located at the juncture of text and technology as two modes of technicity, their intertwinement marks the emergence of *technopoiesis* – a truly remarkable apparatus. Bridging the gap between literary and cybernetic technicity, Entropology bears witness to a fascinating thermodynamic synthesis: Noise and information, sense and nonsense, life and death, order and chaos. Power and resistance. How are we to master and deploy Armand's dispositif?

The AI-dominated Algorocratic future implies the relegation of all ethical matters to tech-experts and data scientists. It entails the destruction of the political as such. In this sense, biopolitics is ultimately a bioeconomics, a colonization of the human lifeworld by the technical, entrepreneurial and computational paradigm. A cybernetic *staticization* of all becoming. A social cybernetics that denies the life-affirming nature of decoherence and entropy, leading paradoxically to an intensification of disorder and the draining of all vitality. By depoliticizing the self, homo Oeconomicus effectively subjects herself to total political control.

Wittgenstein's Tractatus offers a prime illustration of the epistemological trap that characterizes all forms of fascism, especially its Turing-Computable variety. The Logico-Philosophical treatise is effectively a device for philosophical entrapment. A tautological crystal that dazzled and seduced so many minds, both the logical positivists and many an analytical philosopher, especially in the West. If any text bears witness as an Entropological Manifesto, we should say that the TLP does no less so than Entropology. In fact, the level of subversion and deception, one could say, is even more sinister in Wittgenstein's case, since the Tractatus does indeed paint a powerful picture, which again; does indeed hold us captive by catering to the epistemic tyrant within us – our cowardice to face chaos head on and come to terms with the essential entropic nature of language (and life). While at the very last moment the logico-mathematical (in our case cybernetic) heaven is suddenly revoked and we remain grasping at tautologies, powerless and desperate – forced to confront disorder. A bitter remedy for all forms of fascism.

Quoting Zhuang Zhou, Armand writes: *"All the creatures of this world have dimensions that cannot be calculated."* As multiple paradigms in science have repeatedly shown, the underlying being of reality is an astructural becoming. Turbulence orchestrates apparent stabilities. The contemporary epistemic regime attempts to impose a Turing-Computable fascist dispositif that prevents us from seeing how reality is fundamentally played, rather than observed, decrypted, recorded etc. The fact that the universe cannot be a mere representation and the reason why it cannot be modeled has once again re-emerged with the observer's paradox in Quantum Mechanics. What is the uncertainty principle if not the Bergsonian (not just Borgesian) experience of duration coming back to bite the Cartesian subject and the Einsteinian clock in the ass? *"In quantum mechanics, reality is observer-dependent, and observed states are future-determined in a recursively continuous fashion. This apparent retrocausation (sometimes referred to as two-state-vector formalism) raises important questions about classical time-symmetry & the unidirectional character of entropy, which recent experimental results in quantum thermodynamics (& not merely Borgesian fictions) have shown cannot be treated as an absolute concept"* (Armand, 2022). The paradox

reminds us of Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenological deconstruction of space. The world is nothing but flesh and every observation contains its own principle of entropic disintegration *as its own foundation*. An observation is a compartmentalized, folded-in experience of (potential) interactivities. Observation is deeply kinesthetic.

Entropology is a beautiful ode to the Heraclitean flux. A subversive Technopoetic counter-deployment used to deterritorialize the computational codes of cybernetic flesh. A profound meditation on the affectivity of language, life and technology. Entropology gives me hope as I deliberate the possibility of the contemporary avant-garde.

Armand, L. (2022). Entropology. In: Herbrechter, S., Callus, I., Rossini, M., Grech, M., de Bruin-Molé, M., John Müller, C. (eds) Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

[1] Fanon, "The Drowning Eye," 97; Fanon, *Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté*, 78.

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